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ABSTRACT

Children are encouraged early in life to adopt socially appropriate sex-role activities and behaviors. Parents influence their children's behavior and attitudes through the toys they choose for the children and the toy play they sanction. The term androgynous is used to indicate the blending of masculine and feminine characteristics. This study examines the effects of the degree of father involvement on sex-role orientation of the fathers and the children and on the child's sex-typed toy play. It was hypothesized that increased father involvement would reduce sex-role classification. Participants included 90 4-year-old children enrolled in day care and their parents who were of middle to upper middle socioeconomic status. Both parents filled out independent descriptions of typical weeks of their children. From this, the families were classified as high or low in father involvement. Using the Children's Sex-Role Inventory (CSRI), children were classified as androgynous, masculine, feminine, or undifferentiated based on their toy preferences. Results suggested no direct relationship between father involvement and cross-sexed toy play. The study is limited for two reasons: the total degree of father involvement was low and most of the children spent a large portion of their week in day care. Further study might examine fathers who are prime caregivers. (ABL)

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FATHER INVOLVEMENT, SEX-TYPING AND THE TOY PLAY OF CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigated the relationship of increased father involvement and sex-role classification (androgynous, sex-typed, cross-typed or undifferentiated) of family members. In addition, it looked at the relationship between father involvement and play with sex-appropriate toys in children and directives given by the father to the child to play with sex-appropriate toys. Ninety 4-year-old children and their parents served as subjects. Parents first were given a parental questionnaire to assess amount of daily involvement with the child, number and type of toys in the home, and percentage of total time spent in play. Following the median split method, families were then divided, post hoc, into High Father Involvement (HFI) and Low Father Involvement (LFI) families. In addition, they completed the Personal Attributes Questionnaire, a measure of adult sex-role classification. Children were given the Children's Sex-role Inventory, a newly developed toy inventory to assess sex-role classification. In addition, they were observed in three toy play sessions: child playing alone, child playing with mother and child playing with father. Results showed no significant relationship between amount of father involvement and sex-role classification, although results were in the expected direction. In addition, regardless of father involvement, children did not spend more time playing with cross-sexed or neutral toys. A significant effect was found for sex-role classification. Children classified as androgynous spent more time playing with cross-sexed or neutral toys. It was suggested that the lack of significant findings for Father Involvement primarily was due to the

fathers limited involvement in all families. In addition, results are discussed in relationship to present changing ideas of masculinity-femininity and the increased effect of media, teachers, and peers on the growing child's concept of masculinity-femininity. Suggestions for future research include more validation studies of the CSRI. In addition, researchers should actively seek out primary caregiver fathers in order to investigate their behaviors, personal characteristics and the effect on child development.

INTRODUCTION

It is well documented that very early in a child's life both parents, but especially the father, encourage a child to adopt socially sanctioned sex-role activities and behaviors (Fein, Johnson, Kosson, Stock & Wasserman, 1975). One way which parents teach this is through play.

Research shows that toy-mediated play is one important way in which young boys and girls incorporate sex-differentiated behaviors and activities during early childhood (Chance, 1979). Play allows children to practice and explore roles that have been encouraged and modeled by parents. By choosing certain toys for their children's room (Rheingold & Cook, 1985) or by punishing cross-sexed toy play (Langlois and Downs, 1980) parents transmit their expectations and attitudes to their children. However, although parents often have specific attitudes and norms regarding appropriate sex-differentiated behaviors which they would prefer their boys and girls to adopt, deviation from these expectations doe not necessarily lead to problems in development (Bem, 1977).

As the young child's primary role models, parents can each incorporate behaviors and activities that are appropriate for both sexes. Bem and others have used the term "androgynous" to designate those individuals who successfully blend masculine and feminine characteristics. Within this orientation, a father who is actively involved in the daily caretaking of the child could not be considered androgynous, at least from the standpoint of his parenting skills. Thus, the child would be exposed to a male who not only maintains the traditional role of breadwinner, but who also adopts the traditional role of caregiver. Such a home environment would be expected to be reflected in the child's play, as she learns and

refines various social roles through play activities. The purpose of the present study was to investigate the effects of degree of father involvement on sex-role orientation of the fathers and the children, and on the child's sex-typed toy play. It was expected that the sex-typed differences often found in sex-role classification and toy play between young boys and girls would be reduced in children who's father takes an active, increased involvement in their daily activities and caretaking.

STATEMENT OF HYPOTHESES

1) A greater proportion of fathers from high father involvement (HFI) families, as compared to fathers from low father involvement (LFI) families, will be classified as either androgynous or cross-typed rather than sex-typed or undifferentiated, as measured by the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ), a measure of sex-role orientation.

2) A greater proportion of children from HFI families, as compared to children from LFI families, will be classified as either androgynous or cross-typed rather than sex-typed or undifferentiated, as measured by the Children's Sex-Role Inventory (CSRI).

3) Children from HFI families, as compared to child from LFI families, will spend more time playing with cross-sexed or neutral toys.

METHOD

Ninety four-year-old (M=51m) children and their parents served as subjects. All children attended day care centers for an average of 20 hours a week. Hollingshead's Four Factor Index (1970) placed the sample in the middle to upper middle socioeconomic status (mean index of 51).

Each mother and father first were instructed to complete a chart describing the daily activities in the child's "typical week". They completed the chart separately with no collaboration. They were told to exclude times when the child attended day care, was with a babysitter, or when she was asleep. Using the median split method, families were then divided, post hoc, into high father involvement (HFI) and low father involvement (LFI) families on the basis of their responses on the amount of time spent in caretaking with the child. Forty-five families were in each father involvement group. Both parents then completed the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ), which is a self-administered adjective - rating scale of 24 items (The PAQ asks adults to rate themselves by choosing a letter which best describes them from not at all -A- to very much -E-. Adults then are classified either as androgynous, feminine, masculine, or undifferentiated).

All children in the study were first given a newly developed toy inventory (CSRI). The CSRI assesses sex-role classification in children by asking them to rate how much they like a certain toy (Twenty toy items are divided into groups of traditionally masculine, feminine, or neutral toys. Children are then classified as either androgynous, masculine, feminine, or undifferentiated, depending on their scores. Subjects receive scores from one - the child did not like the toy very much - to

four - the child wanted to play with the toy very much - for each item). The children then were observed playing with the toys from the CSPI for 10 minutes in 3 sessions: each individual child first played alone, then played with father, and then with mother. Mothers and fathers alternated as the first playmate. All the sessions were videotaped for later scoring.

RESULTS

Results showed that the total percentage of time HFI fathers spend with the child ranged from .11 to .49, while the time for LFI fathers ranged from .00 to .10. In addition, there were no significant results for amount of father involvement and father sex-role classification X^2 (3,N=90) = .92, $p < .82$, mother sex-role classification X^2 (3,N=90) = .47, $p < .92$ or child sex-role classification X^2 (3,N=90) =2.07, $p < .56$, although results were in the hypothesized direction. Children from HFI families, as compared to children from LFI families, did not spend more time playing with cross-sexed (boys playing with "feminine" toys and girls playing with "masculine" toys) or neutral (toys appropriate for both sexes) toys, as hypothesized. Father involvement was not a significant factor, nor did it interact significantly with either sex-role classification or toy play sessions. However, a significant effect was found for sex-role classification F (2,83)=3.52, $p < .03$: androgynous children were more likely to play with cross-sexed or neutral toys.

CONCLUSION

The results of the present study highlight the need for further study of father involvement and the impact on various child behaviors, of which sex-role classification and toy play are but two. Although this study suggests no direct relationship between father involvement of family members and cross-sexed toy play in children, it is limited in two ways: 1) although there was a wide range of father involvement, total degree of father involvement was still low; and 2) most of the children spend a large portion of their week in day care centers or nursery schools.

The present study was one of the few studies to investigate the impact of father involvement (Lamb, Frodi, Hwang, Frodi, Steinberg, 1981), highlighting the fact that fathers still are not very available to their children. Even when they are available, both HFI and LFI fathers, when compared to the mothers, are more likely to play with their child rather then tend to their physical needs. Mothers in both HFI and LFI families (52%) were more likely to tend to the caretaking needs of the child than were HFI and LFI fathers (11%), suggesting that there is still a traditional sex-role division of labor, even in the supposed egalitarian-minded 1980's. Future studies should actively seek out fathers who are the prime caregivers of their child, to assess the characteristics of such families.

As society and social roles continue to change, it may be necessary to re-evaluate the attribute of masculinity and femininity. Although the present study did not find a relationship between sex-role classification and father involvement, this may be due to the fact that the classifications, as they are now defined, are no longer appropriate. With

more women in the work force (traditionally a masculine activity) and more fathers participating in child care (traditionally a feminine activity), a re-definition of our present conception of masculinity and femininity seems warranted.

Children are exposed to many examples of masculine and feminine behaviors from teachers, peers, and media. Since most of the children in the present study attended day care or pre-school an average of 20 hours a week, teachers and peers may have affected the present results. In addition, correlational studies (McGhee & Freuh, 1980) have demonstrated the effect of television on sex-typing in children. These and other studies suggest that children learn sex-appropriate behaviors from many agents in society. Future studies should investigate sex-typing in children who do not attend day care or pre-schools, and in children whose parents actively reduce the number of sex-typed toys and books in the home.

The present study found a significant relationship between the child's sex-role classification, as measured by the CSRI, and the child's play with cross-sex or neutral toys. Because it was the first study to investigate such a relationship, more such studies using the CSRI are needed. One might consider adapting the CSRI for use with younger children (ages 2 or 3) by simplifying the four choice format and the directions. Given the importance of the three to five years age range for sex-role development, an adapted CSRI would certainly add important information to present research.

Finally, the present study looked at activities in a typical week for families sampled. The use of weekly charts to assess paternal involvement allowed for more precise information to be obtained regarding the family lifestyle. Thus, by obtaining information in this manner, a more accurate measure could be obtained in order to determine how involved the father is with his child.

Table

Proportion of High Father Involvement Fathers Versus Low Father Involvement Fathers Classified as Androgynous, Cross-Typed, Sex-Typed and Undifferentiated

Classification	Father Involvement		
	High Father Involvement (n=45)	Low Father Involvement (n=45)	Total (N=90)
Androgynous	.20	.17	.19
Cross-typed	.11	.07	.09
Sex-typed	.44	.45	.44
Undifferentiated	.25	.31	.28

Table

Proportion of High Father Involvement Children Versus Low Father Involvement Children Classified as Androgynous, Cross-Typed, Sex-Typed and Undifferentiated,

	Father Involvement		
Classification	High Father Involvement (n=45)	Low Father Involvement (n=45)	Total (N=90)
Androgynous	.40	.33	.37
Cross-typed	.02	.00	.01
Sex-typed	.18	.27	.22
Undifferentiated	.40	.40	.40

Table

Mean Number of Minutes of Time in Play With Cross-Sexed or Neutral Toys in HFI and LFI Children

Sex-role Classification	N	HFI Toy Play Sessions			LFI Toy Play Sessions		
		Alone	Mother	Father	Alone	Mother	Father
Androgynous	33	4.71	5.20	5.81	6.08	6.55	6.81
Cross-typed	01	4.08	8.43	4.65*	.00	.00	.00
Sex-typed	20	3.41	5.02	5.17	3.31	4.45	5.82
Undifferentiated	36	3.73	4.44	5.09	4.41	5.72	4.29

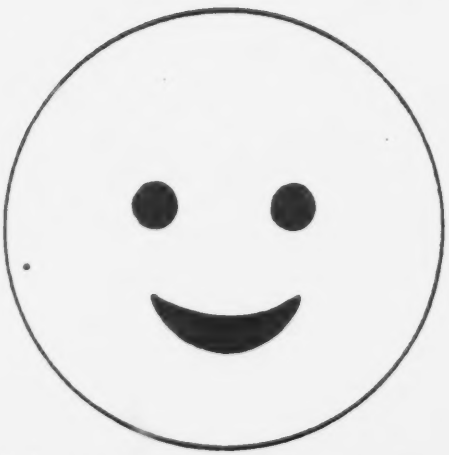
*This subject was not included in the analysis.

Rating Scale: CSRI

(1) Don't want to play with it at all

(2) Don't want to play with it very much

(3) Want to play with it a little bit



(4) Want to play with it very much

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